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Tips for a Safe Meal on Thanksgiving

San Bernardino: With any holiday food preparation, safe food handling and storage are important to keep your loved ones safe. Follow these helpful tips to prepare a safe Thanksgiving meal for your family.

Handling and Thawing. Always wash your hands with warm water and soap for at least 15 seconds before and after handling the turkey. Fresh turkeys need no thawing and are ready to cook. Frozen turkeys can be purchased weeks in advance, but require several days to thaw before cooking. If you are planning on purchasing a frozen turkey, first make sure there is sufficient space in your freezer for storage.

Never defrost the turkey on the counter! The safest way to thaw a turkey is in the refrigerator. Leave the turkey in the original packaging and place in a shallow pan and allow refrigerator thawing time at a rate of 4 to 5 pounds per 24 hours.

Time to cook. Cook the turkey immediately after it is thawed. Do not refreeze. If you purchase a fresh turkey, cook it within a day or two of purchase. Insert a meat thermometer into the thickest part of the thigh, not touching bone, and cook to a minimum internal temperature of 165°F. Check the internal temperature in the innermost part of the thigh and wing and the thickest part of the breast as well. Cook stuffing separately in a casserole pan to a safe minimum internal temperature of 165°F or higher. If you cook stuffing in the turkey, ensure that the turkey and stuffing both reach 165°F or higher.

Storing leftovers safely. Within two hours, store leftover turkey in shallow containers and put in the refrigerator or freezer. Use cooked leftover turkey, stuffing and gravy within 3 to 4 days. When using leftovers, reheat the foods thoroughly to 165°F and steaming; bring gravy to a boil before serving.

For more information, contact the County of San Bernardino Department of Public Health, Division of Environmental Health Services at (800) 442-2283 or visit our website at www.sbcounty.gov/dehs.

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